

# From Goals to Gains: Embedding Social Impact and Sustainability Literacy into the Curriculum



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# So, what do we all think about sustainability today?

*What is our personal level of concern for sustainability?*

1. Low
2. Medium
3. High
4. Panic

*What is our level of knowledge and understanding about sustainability?*

1. What's that?
2. "Person-in-the-street"
3. Informed citizen
4. Expert

*How important is sustainability as a learning outcome in Higher Education?*

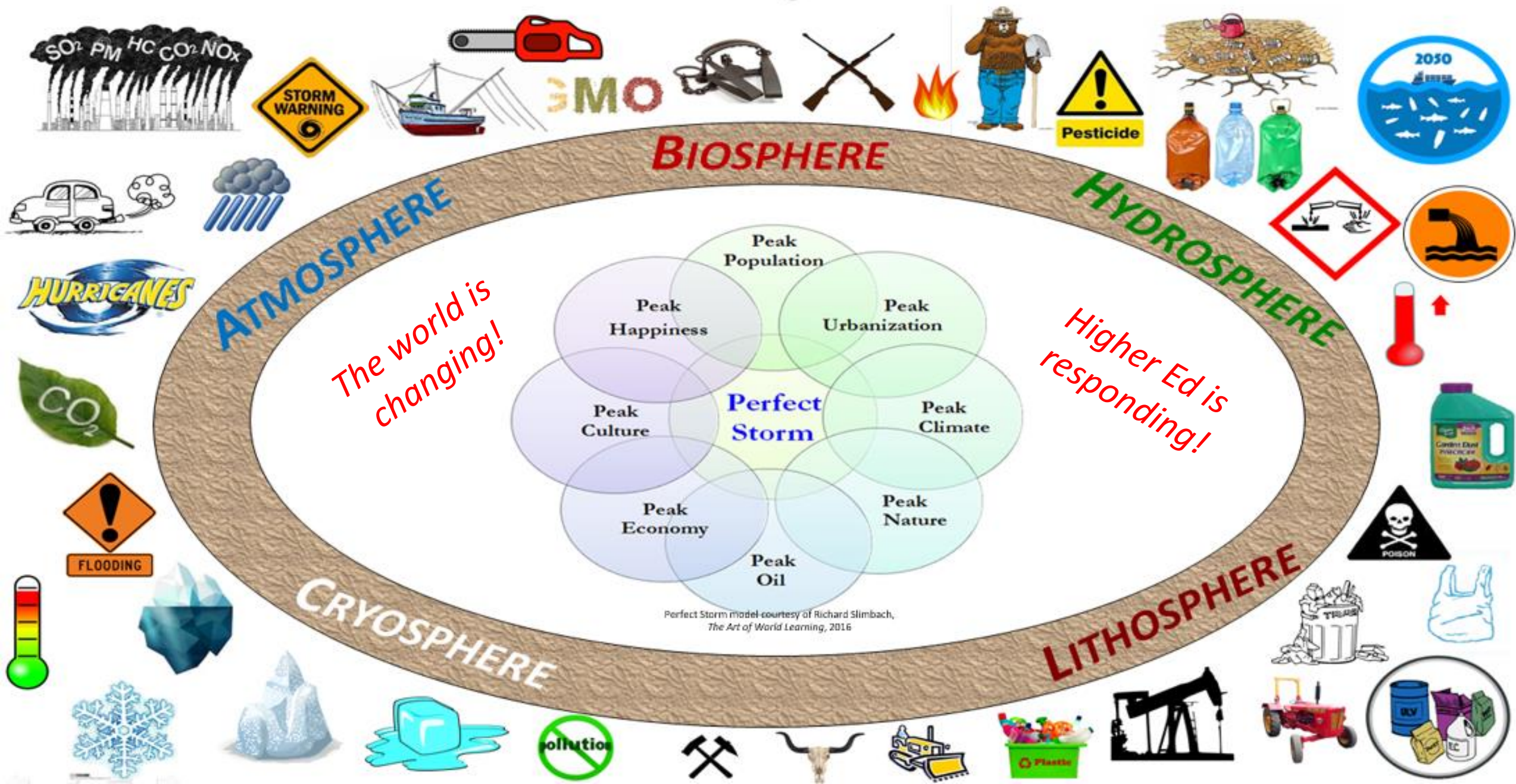
1. Not at all
2. Somewhat useful
3. Pretty relevant
4. Critically important

*How would you describe your agency's engagement with sustainability?*

1. We lag behind.
2. We do a few things.
3. It's a key focus.
4. We're a leader.

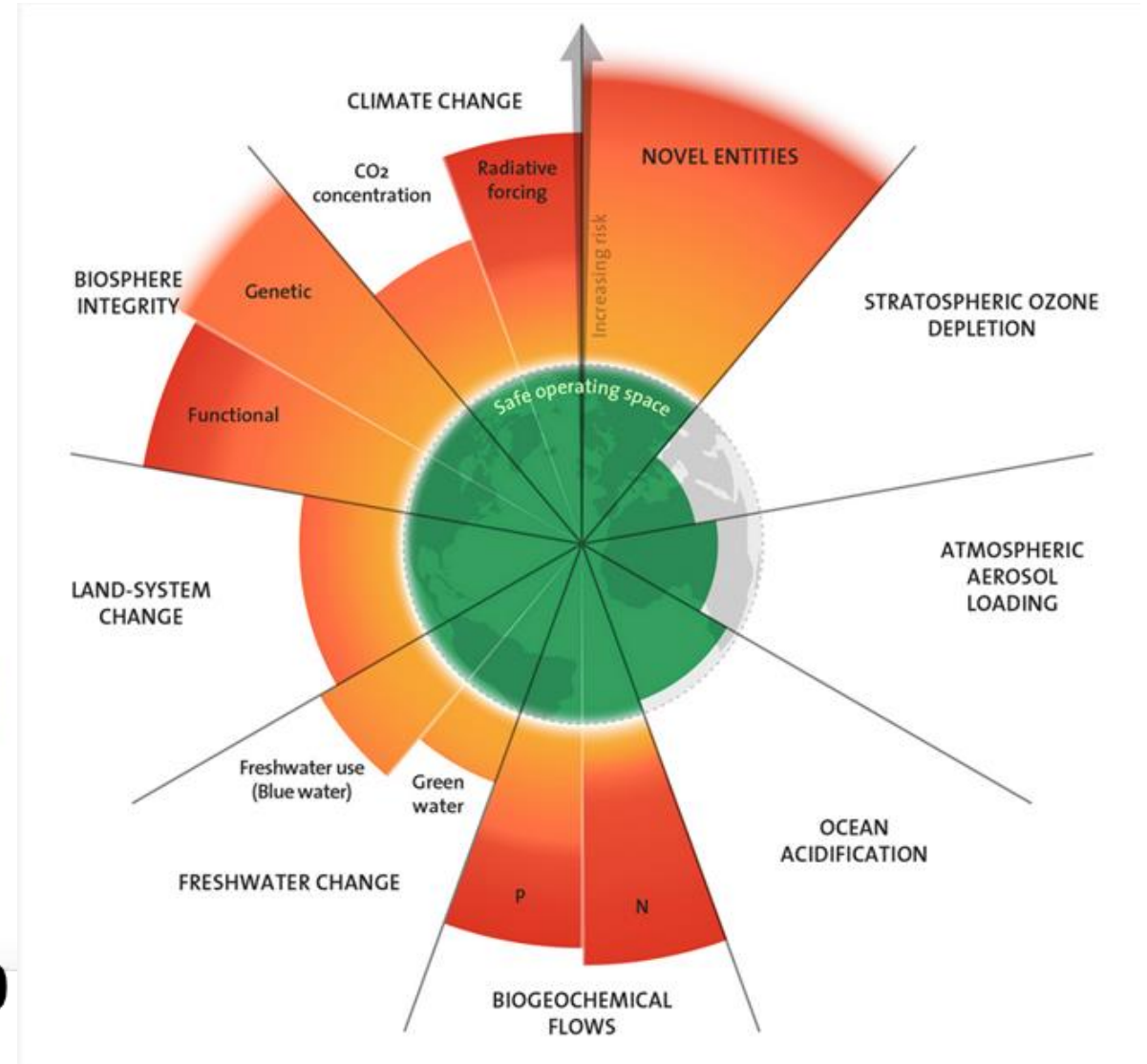


# What We Have is a Global Systemic Structural Crisis





# Our Challenge: What Response from Higher Education and QA Agencies and Accreditors



## The Sustainable Development Goals for 2030

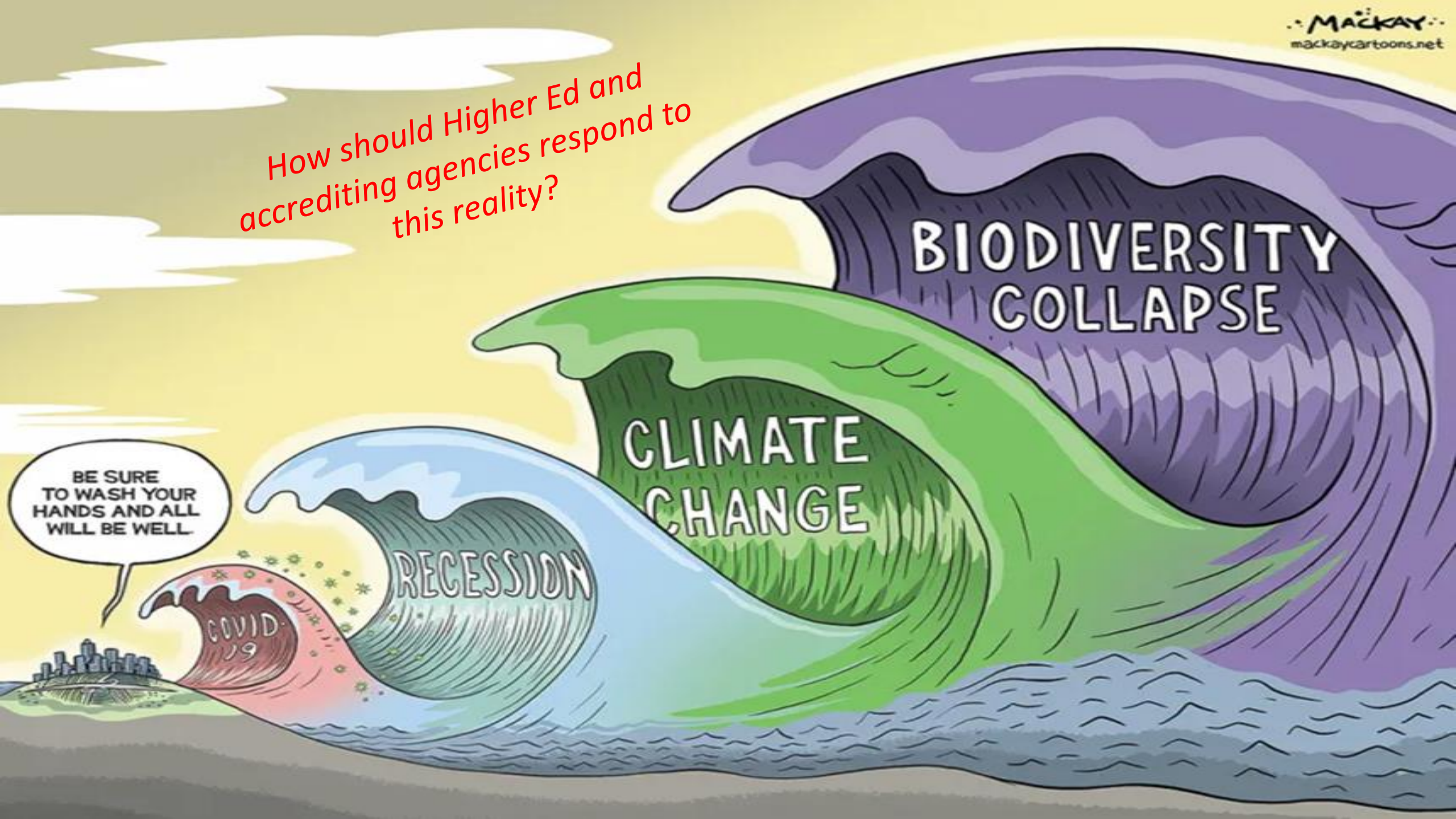
Source: Stockholm Resilience Center

## Six Planetary Boundaries Crossed - 2023

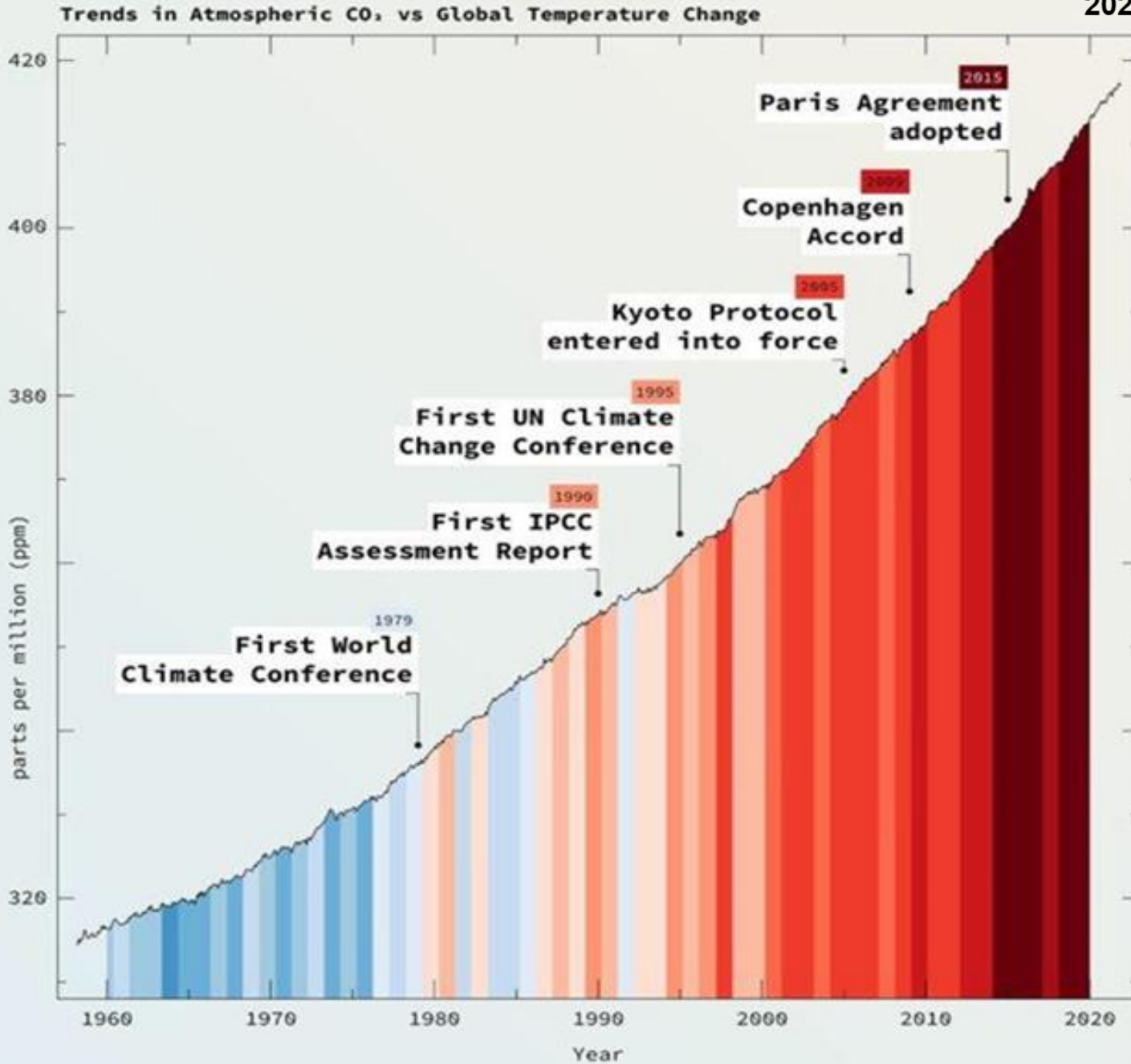
Credit: Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, based on Richardson et al, 2023; Steffen et al, 2015; Rockström, 2009."

How should Higher Ed and  
accrediting agencies respond to  
this reality?

BE SURE  
TO WASH YOUR  
HANDS AND ALL  
WILL BE WELL







# Atmospheric Trends vs. Political Action (and educational outcomes)

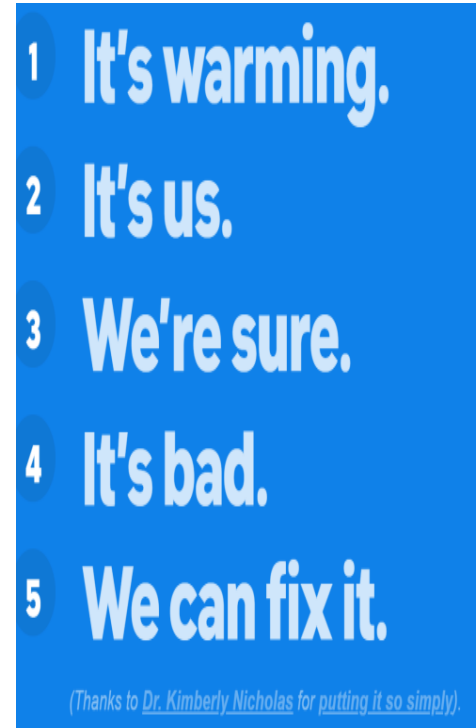
*What can Higher Ed and accreditation agencies do to stop this trend?*

# Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Sixth Assessment Report - Feb 28, 2022

*Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation & Vulnerability*

## IPCC Key Findings



1. **Things are worse than we thought.** Impacts are trending towards worst-case outcomes and more quickly than early models projected.
2. **Things will continue to get worse.** Widespread adverse impacts and related losses and damages to nature and people will continue to occur and worsen.
3. **Technology is not going to save us.** Plus, some “tech fixes” will make things worse.
4. **There's little time to act.** Any further delay in concerted global action will miss a brief and rapidly closing window to secure a liveable future.
5. **There's still hope.** There's still time to act but deep, sustained, and immediate reductions of CO2 emissions must take place in advance of 2030.

Accreditation agencies  
can help fix this!

# And what do **students** think about sustainability?

- **75% say they're worried** about climate change and their future. (World)
- **74%** say a college's environmental commitment would contribute to their application and enrollment decisions. (US)
- **90%** of respondents say they are **willing to accept a salary sacrifice** to work in a company with a good environmental and social record (World)
- **92%** agree that sustainable development is something which **all universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote** (World)
- **59% classify their institutions as being "somewhat" environmentally sustainable** (dining, transportation, cleaning practices, recycling/waste management, water use, energy use, grounds care and new construction). Fewer than **one-quarter rate their college as very sustainable** (US)
- **40%** report **low or no coverage** of sustainable development concept **in their course** curriculum (World)
- **85%** say it's something **they want to learn more** about (World)
- **73%** want to see it **covered in all courses**. (World)

*What can accreditation agencies do to help students get the kind of education they want and need?*



Ranking, Rating & Assessment  
(UN HESI - Higher Education Sustainability Initiative)



## ...and what about *Rankings, Ratings, & Assessment*?

*Something is changing in the way students think about what constitutes a quality education.*

- **Times Higher Education Impact Rankings**, 4th edition : 1,400 universities from 106 countries/regions
- **QS World University Ranking**, first edition : 700 universities
- **Princeton Review's Green Colleges Ranking** (Sustainability Practices) (450 Colleges)
- **AASHE -- STARS** (The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System) 350+ universities in US / Can
- **UN HESI working Group** (Corporate Knights, FT, Round University Ranking, THE, UBI Global, Elsevier, QS, Positive Impact Ranking, and Cabells)

*These ranking and rating systems exist because HEIs purchase and invest in them. They do this because (as we just saw) they know students care about sustainability.*

*Students are driving this agenda  
and they will abandon institutions that are not doing enough!*

# Selected Examples of Assessment Indicators in Sustainability



## SDG-17. Partnerships for the Goals — 17.4 Education for the SDGs

*How are universities teaching the next generation to adopt sustainability in their lives.*

### Indicator 17.4.1—Education for SDGs commitment to meaningful education

*Have a commitment to meaningful education around the SDGs across the university, relevant and applicable to all students*

### Indicator 17.4.2—Education for SDGs: Specific courses on sustainability

*Have dedicated courses (full degrees, or electives) that address sustainability and the SDGs*

# ...and what about Accreditation Associations and oversight agencies?

*Things are beginning to change...*

- **EQUIS** – New chapter 9 dedicated to “Ethics, Responsibility, and Sustainability” (179 accredited business schools)
- **AACSB** – New standard 9 – “Engagement and Societal Impact” (950 accredited business schools)
- **Association of MBAs** – Criteria 3.6 (MBA Design, Curriculum & Assessment) “Understand and respond through sound business practices to the challenges facing the planet (environment, climate change, global warming, social cohesion)” (260 accredited business schools)
- **AABS-Association of African Business Schools** 8.1 Program portfolio “Describe how the programs provided contribute to sustainable development of the country and region.”

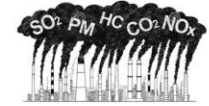
*...but there's still so much to more to change!*



# THE GREENING OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION

Greening the standards of institutional accreditation would provide colleges, universities, and business schools with the motivation they currently lack to address the climate crisis head-on. This poster provides a research-based analysis of the “greenness” of the most prevalent accreditation standards used in Higher Education today. We textually deconstruct accreditation standards, display their eco-sensitivity, and provide carrots and sticks for strengthening accrediting bodies in line with the UN SDGs and planetary boundaries.

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## 1. Research Questions

**Primary:** To what extent do national and international accrediting and quality assurance bodies in higher education, through formal accreditation *Standards*, require or encourage HEIs to address SDG issues and goals?

**Secondary:** To what extent do recognized public or private agencies charged with regulating national or international accrediting bodies require or encourage such agencies to address SDG issues and goals?

## 2. Methodology

- Using a selection of major accreditation *Standards* most widely used in international higher education today (both institutional and programmatic), we perform a textual search for words, concepts, and ideas potentially relatable to key ecological or environmental issues as described in the 17 *UN Sustainable Development Goals*.
- Key words are selected for their relevance to the SDGs, to the larger systemic threats to climate stability, as well as to ethical principles that should guide us in defining quality education.
- Word searches are performed only upon formal accreditation *Standards* and *Indicators*—the only text with which institutions are required to demonstrate compliance. Auxiliary procedural or promotional text related to the accreditation process or agency is ignored.
- Key search words that are found but whose meaning is clearly non-ecological in intent (e.g., the learning *environment*; a *climate* of collegiality; *sustainable* revenue streams, etc.) are listed but not tallied as positive indicators.
- This same methodology is used for evaluating regional, national, and international umbrella organizations (either public or private) that articulate membership criteria for subordinate accrediting agencies, associations, and commissions.

## 3. Data : The Eco-Sensitivity of Selected Accreditation Regimes, Commissions, & Oversight Agencies

Full Name	Acronym	Focus	Type	Accredited Members	Standards Version	Eco-Sensitivity Indicators																
						140+	250+	110+	220+	55+	8/140+	15/70+	2	1	3	1	2	4	3	2	2	
<b>Europe</b>																						
EFMD-European Quality Improvement System (European Foundation for Management Development)	EQUIS	Business	Programmatic	197	2023	72/72	40/98	0/5	3/40	0	2/40	6/24	1	0	1	1	1	3	2	0	1	
EFMD-Programme Accreditation System	EPAS	Business	Programmatic	100	2023	5/9	4/6	0/2	0	1/2	1/7	4/9	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	
Association of MBAs	AMBA	Business	Programmatic	277	2022	2/2	3/3	1/4	14/26	1/4	1/9	4/10	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	
<b>United States</b>																						
Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (BA)	ABET-EAC	STEM	Programmatic	846	2022	1/1	1/1	0	1/1	0	2/3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
ABET - Applied and Natural Science Accreditation Commission	ABET-ANSAC	Applied & Natural Science	Programmatic	901	2020	2/2	2/4	0	0	0	1/2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business	AACSB	Business	Programmatic	910	2022	0	0	0	4/117	4/53	0/8	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
New England Commission of Higher Education	NECHE	US Regional	Institutional	200	2021	3/9	2/39	30/35	0	0	1/7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Accrediting Council for Business Schools and Programs	ACBSP	Business	Programmatic	961	2021	4/4	4/5	0	2/2	0	0/10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Higher Learning Commission	HLC	US Regional	Institutional	1200	2020	0/5	1/3	3/5	0	0	0/2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities	NWCCU	US Regional	Institutional	156	2020	1/1	0	0/4	0	0	0/5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Middle States Commission on Higher Education	MSCHE	US Regional	Institutional	600	2023	0/9	0/14	2/5	0	0	0/1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
WASC Senior College and University Commission	WSCUC	US Regional	Institutional	221	2022	0	1/4	2/2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Southern Association of Colleges & Schools Commission on Colleges	SACSCOC	US Regional	Institutional	780	2017	0	0/17	5/12	0	0	0/5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges	ACCJC	US Regional	2-yr Institutional	137	2014	4/4	1/8	16/22	0	0	0/2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges	ACCSC	Professional Education	Non-degree	650	2022	0	0	0	0	0	0/8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>International / Regional</b>																						
Association of African Business Schools	AABS	Business	Institutional	28	2018	12/13	13/13	2/2	0/35	0	0/28	1/28	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Ed. ASG-QA -- Internal Quality Assurance (A) (pp.13-26)	IQA	Institutional	Institutional	0	2018	4/4	4/11	2/6	0	0	0/2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
International Accreditation Council for Business Education	IACBE	Business	Programmatic	2075	2022	2/2	2/2	1/1	0	0	0/2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Ed. ASG-QA -- External Quality Assurance (B) (pp.27-31)	EQA	Institutional	Institutional	0	2018	0	0/3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Oversight Agencies</b>																						
CHEA Standards of Recognition (2021)	CHEA	Oversight	General	62	2021	1/0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Department of Education	DOE	Oversight	General	37	2020	0	3/10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Ed.	INQAAHE	Oversight	General	191	2022	0/1	0/12	0/3	0	0	0/1	0/4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
European Network for Quality Assurance	ENQUA	Oversight	General	54	2015	0	0/1	0/1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
ASG-QA -- Quality Assurance Agency (C.) (pp.32-37)	QUA	Oversight	General	0	2018	3/3	0/3	5/5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

## 4. Initial Findings

**Higher Ed Accreditation lacks engagement with SDG issues and global challenges...**

- Silence of US Regional and most European *Standards* on sustainability
- Absence of the concept within formal *Standards* on ethics and integrity
- Widespread irrelevance of SDGs vis-à-vis *Standards* compliance and accreditation
- Commissions and agencies in this study accredit over **10 K** HEIs or business programs

## 5. Recommendations & Next Steps

**...but there are compelling carrots and sticks for reforming Quality Assurance**

- Join forces among agency members to re-write accreditation *Standards*
- Engage with CHEA, INQAAHE, and the EU to initiate deep and urgent reform
- Inform students of this root cause of climate inaction in Higher Education
- Ensure quality assurance requires the assessment of sustainability literacy

The silence of accreditation and quality assurance vis-à-vis the ...



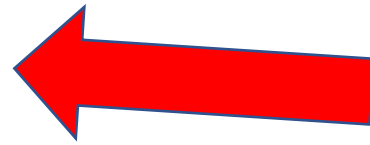
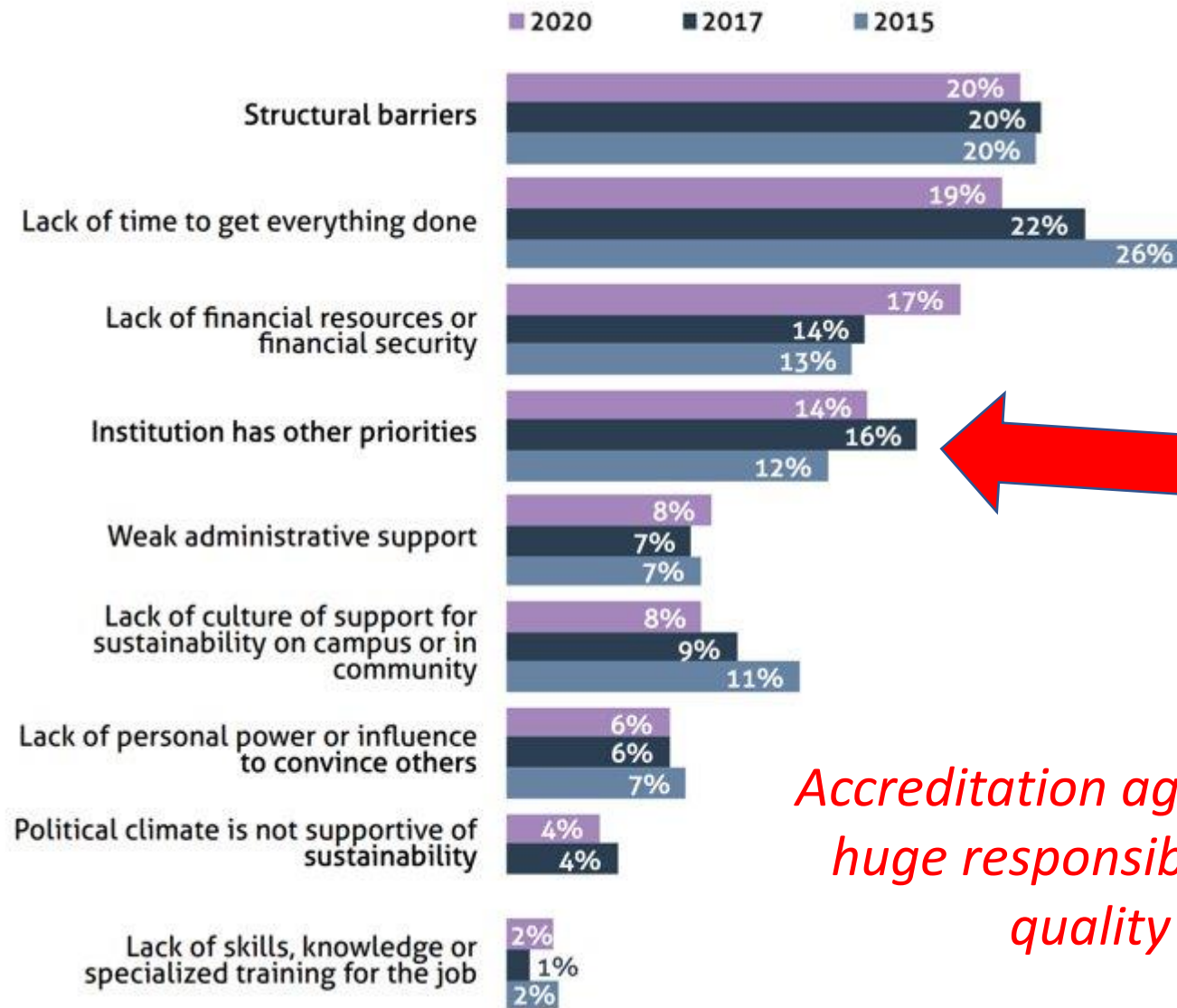
Words & acronyms wholly absent from accreditation *Standards* in 2020, some of which are starting to appear in 2023!



The truth, folks, is that Colleges, Universities, and particularly Business Schools won't seriously address the climate crisis, the collapse of biodiversity, and the SDGs until accrediting agencies require them to do so. It's the accrediting bodies that are holding things up!  
**Let's demand better of ourselves!**



# So, what is hindering HEIs from acting?



*But, if accreditation agencies required HEIs to provide data-based evidence that sustainability learning outcomes were an institutional priority, these other barriers would be addressed and progressively overcome.*

*Accreditation agencies have a huge opportunity—and a huge responsibility—in redefining what constitutes a quality education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*



# The role of HE in creating a sustainable future

- **Sustainable Development** - an aspirational ongoing process of addressing social, environmental and economic concerns to create a better world.
- **Education for Sustainable Development** - the process of creating curriculum structures and subject-relevant content to support and enact sustainable development.

AdvanceHE



## Education for Sustainable Development Guidance

### Executive Summary

March 2021





# The role of HE in creating a sustainable future

- **Gains**
  - Knowledge, skills and attributes associated with ESD
  - ESD as a 'unifying force', facilitating a culture of co-design and collaboration
- **Responsibilities and positionality**
  - What is within your gift to influence?
  - What does meaningful change look like to you?
  - Empowering students to start the conversation



## Education for Sustainable Development - Student Resource

### Starting the conversation

QAA and Advance HE have published new guidance on [Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\)](#) in higher education, which aims to help UK higher education providers incorporate ESD within their courses.

It is vital that students are involved in the development and implementation of ESD and this resource is intended to support you in actively engaging with your institution and students' union (or equivalent student representative body).

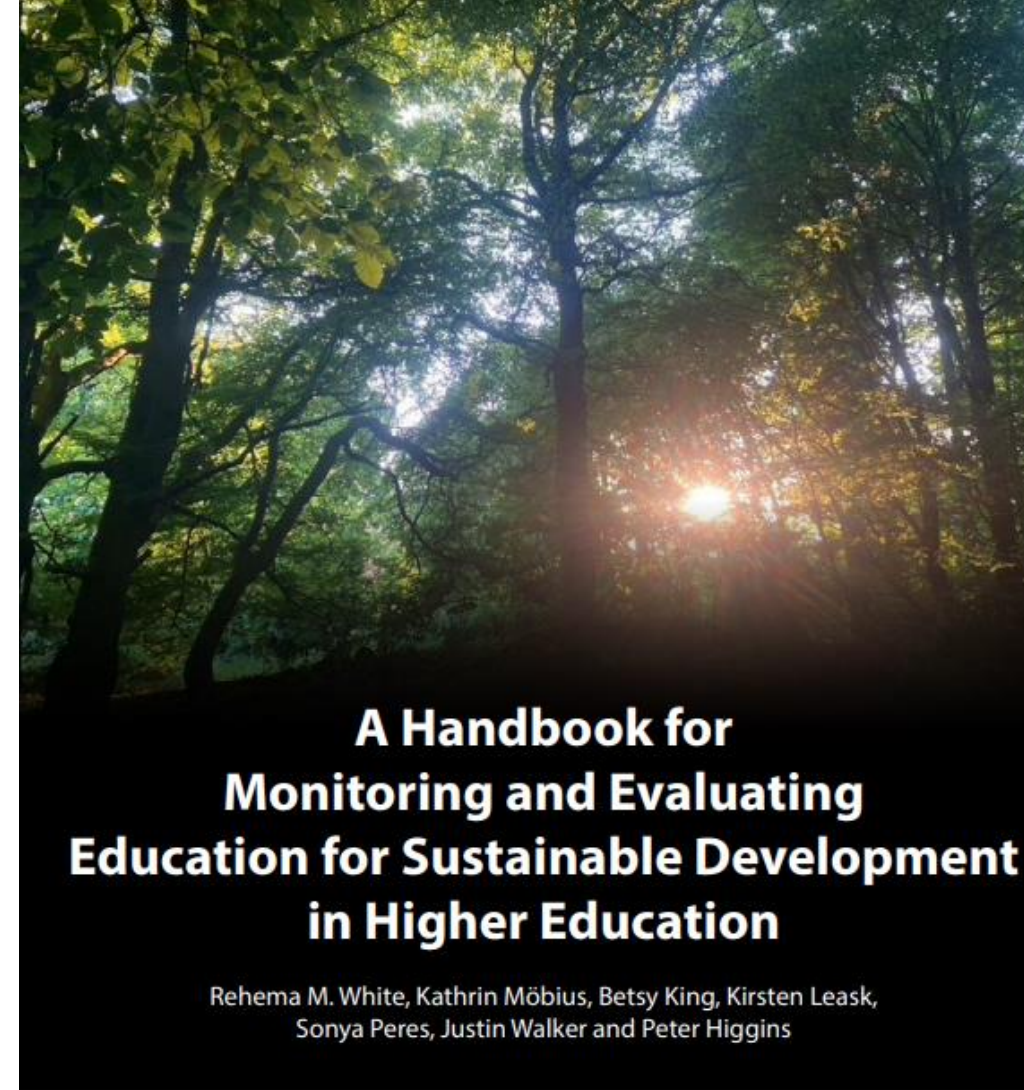
The questions below offer a starting point to prompt your thinking about ESD activities at your institution. They invite you to develop your knowledge and awareness of ESD, and to source information to help you embed practices in support of ESD. Depending on your institution and the question, these can be directed to your course leader or course rep, students' union or other representative body, or the relevant student support services.

To find out about the sustainability activities happening in your institution, you may want to start by searching your institution's website or students' union website. For more about ESD more generally, other websites that may be useful are [NUS-Students Organising for Sustainability \(NUS-SOS\)](#) and the [UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals](#).



# QAA & ESD

- [Education for Sustainable Development Guidance](#)
- **Collaborative Enhancement Projects**
  - [ESD and Academic Quality](#) (De Montfort University)
  - [Monitoring and Evaluating ESD in HE](#) (University of St Andrews)
  - [Students Driving Curriculum Quality for Sustainability](#) (University of Gloucestershire)
  - [A toolkit for implementing Phenomenon-Based Learning as part of a future-proofed SDG HE curriculum](#) (Staffordshire University)
  - [Using Generative AI to promote ESD and widen access to digital skills](#) (London Metropolitan University)
- [Subject Benchmark Statements](#)
- [What is ESD?](#) (Explainer video for students)





# Another Part of the Solution...

... Set the standard for universities and organizations

**TASK™ — THE ASSESSMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY KNOWLEDGE**

TASK™ is an online certification assessment of an individual's sustainability knowledge, which can be offered by institutions to their stakeholders.

- As a robust *measurement* tool, it provides the institution **relevant, reliable, and comparable metrics** for monitoring education for sustainability
- Assessing what is defined as “**sustainability as the common language**”, TASK can be integrated to in any program or training
- Available in English and French



**Students and Individuals**  
to understand and demonstrate their systemic sustainability knowledge



**Universities and Companies**  
to measure the level of sustainability knowledge to steer strategy and demonstrate impact



**Ranking & Accreditation Bodies**  
to have relevant, robust and comparable data of sustainability knowledge outcomes, provided by universities

*The 1<sup>st</sup> online certificate for the assessment of sustainability knowledge*





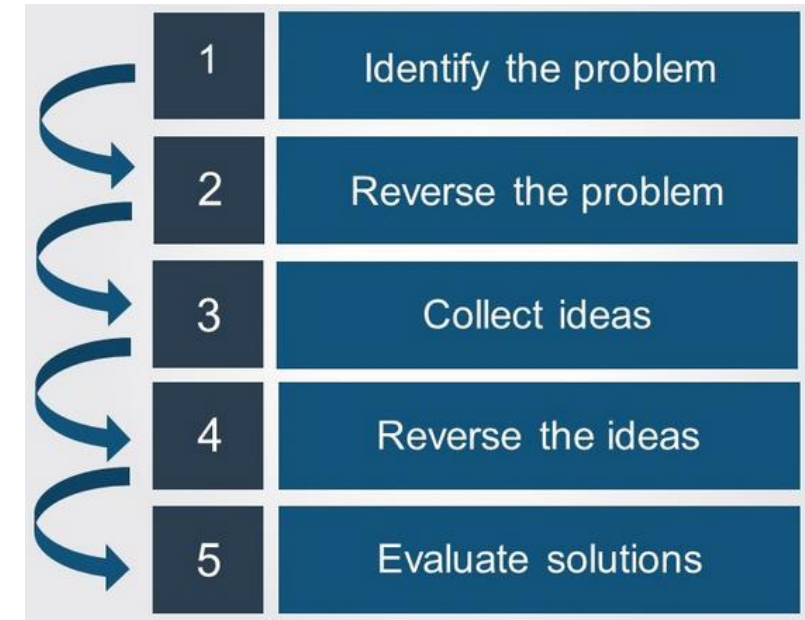
# REVERSE BRAINSTORMING

Reverse brainstorming is a problem-solving technique that consists in thinking about a problem in reverse. Instead of thinking of direct solutions to a problem, reverse brainstorming works by identifying ways in which you might cause or make a problem worse.

Then, we work backwards to find ways to prevent or eliminate those negative consequences. This approach helps generate new and innovative solutions that might not have been considered with traditional brainstorming methods.



*Reverse brainstorming takes advantage of the natural human tendency to see problems more easily than solutions.*



# Identifying & Overcoming Impediments to Curricular Reform

## for Maximizing Social Impact and Environmental Stewardship

Table 1

### The Institutional Perspective

Stakeholders: Leaders, staff, faculty, students, etc.

*What can we do to ensure curricular reform never happens?*

#### Examples

- Ignore the Earth crisis when teaching
- Don't engage students
- Add your ideas here

Turn bad practice into good

Articulate 3 QA indicator statements

**Debrief**

1. Identify problem

Reverse Brainstorming

2. Reverse problem

3. Collect ideas

4. Reverse ideas

5. Evaluate solutions

Table 2

### The Quality Assurance Perspective

Stakeholders: QU agencies, accreditors, INQAAHE, etc.

*What can we do to ensure curricular reform never happens?*

#### Examples

- Don't revise standards & indicators
- Don't redefine "quality"
- Add your ideas here

Turn bad practice into good

Articulate 3 QA indicator statements

**Debrief**

# ***Key Questions to Consider***

How can accreditation agencies help their institutions prepare for what students are now demanding of them?

What minimal level of sustainability knowledge must now be considered an essential part of a “quality education”?

How will accreditation bodies evaluate the sustainability knowledge that institutions will soon start claiming they are providing to their students?

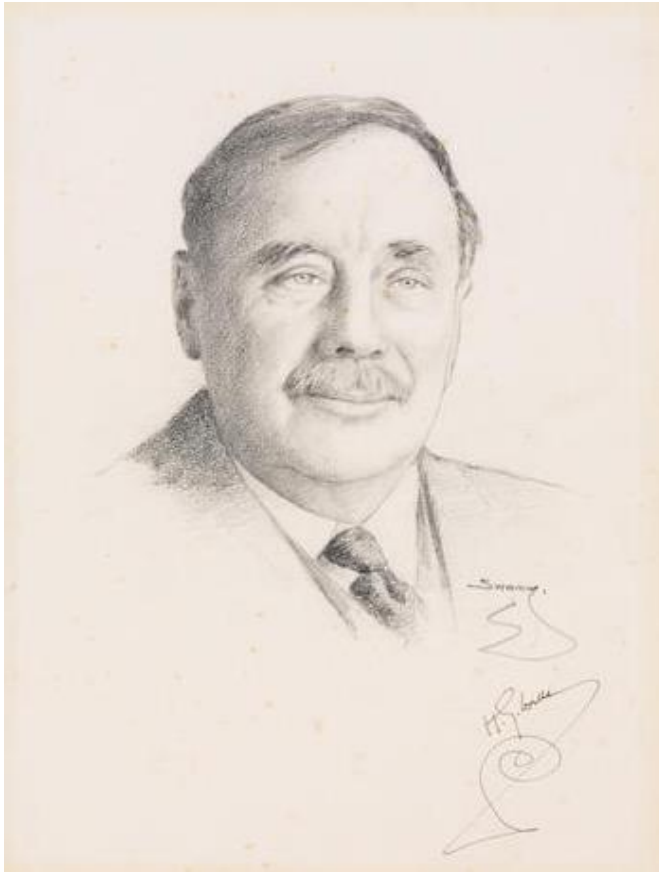
How will accreditation bodies compare the information provided from one institution to the next?

How will we know instructors are effective in integrating sustainability into course teaching and learning outcomes?

In the eyes of stakeholders, how can accreditors remain “credible” without robust standards on sustainability?

What role should networks like INQAAHE, ENQA, or CHEA play in assessing member’s “quality assurance” in sustainability?

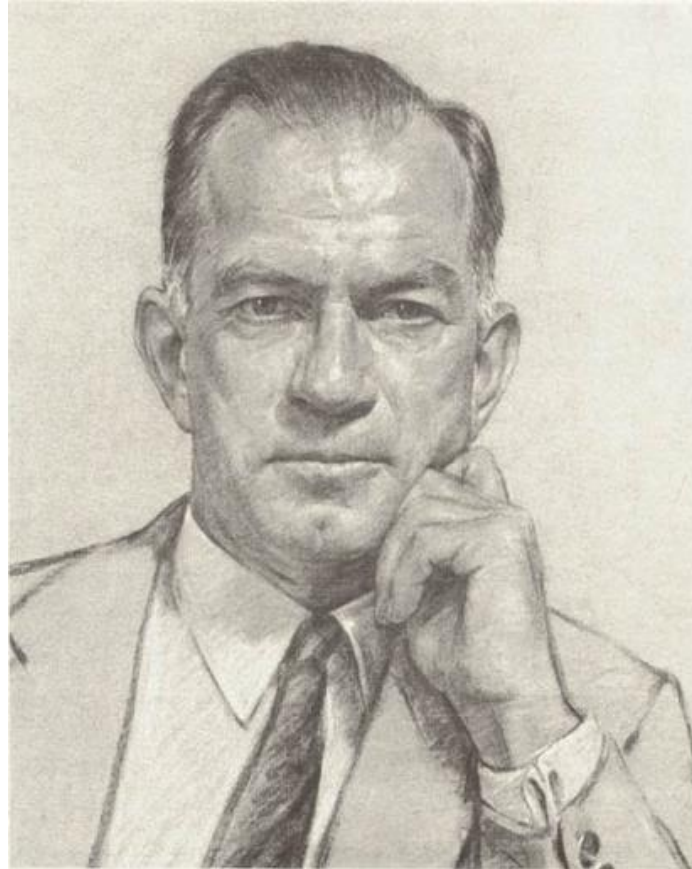




**H.G. Wells**  
1866–1946

*Civilization is a race between  
catastrophe and education.*

## **Only Education Can Save Us!**



**J. William Fulbright**  
1905–1995

*Education is a slow-moving  
but powerful force.*

*It may not be fast enough or  
strong enough to save us  
from catastrophe, but it is  
the strongest force available  
for that purpose and in its  
proper place, therefore, is  
not at the periphery, but at  
the center of international  
relations.*

**The Race is On!**  
*Will Higher Ed accreditors be a part of it?*

***Mulțumesc!    Merci Beaucoup!    Thank you!***



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